



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

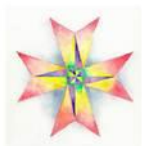
A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session Mary Birmingham

Incarnation



ICON: Ranosonar: the copyright holder of this work, hereby release it into the [public domain](#). This applies worldwide. I grant anyone the right to use this work for any purpose, without any conditions, unless such conditions are required by law. Released into the public domain,



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer given below.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

✓ Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham, 2011.

All rights reserved.

Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT

Rev. Steven Olds

Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR

† Most Rev. John Noonan

Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana

Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

Published cooperatively by

TeamRCIA.com and

PastoralPlanning.com.

If presented during Advent, please read this opening statement:

- In these days of Advent as we await the birth of Christ, it is time for us to reflect on the awesome mystery we affirm every time we gather for liturgy. We profess our faith in God who took human form, who became one with us in every way except sin in order to save the world. It is easy to give assent to this doctrine as it is so commonly professed by Christian traditions. Yet, how often do we take the time to really focus on the implications of this amazing saving event in human history? Today we will focus on this awesome mystery.

If presented on Epiphany, please read this opening statement:

- Even though there is great emphasis placed on the story of the magi, the theme of this feast transcends the manifestation of God to the Gentiles and places God's self revelation to humanity in the person of Christ front and center. This is another manifestation in a line of manifestations during this Christmas season: to the shepherds, to Mary, the Mother of God, to John at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and now to the Gentiles. As the magi were considered Gentiles, the feast proclaimed the manifestation of God's mission to the Gentiles, that is, to all nations. Today's liturgy remembers and makes present the very mystery it celebrates—the manifestation of God's power, God's salvation to the entire human race, the Incarnation of his Son.



Sharing Human Experience

Catechist leads participants in a small group sharing exercise built upon the *Velveteen Rabbit*. Break into small groups of three or four people. Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond to the questions.

Catechist prepares for the story in these or similar words...

VELVETEEN RABBIT

Let us listen to a segment of the story, “The Velveteen Rabbit.” While nothing can fully capture the full meaning and implications of the Incarnation of Jesus, this story is a wonderful imaginative reminder of what the Incarnation is about.

The velveteen rabbit was a sawdust-filled toy that felt that it wasn't as real as the fancy mechanical ones—until one day the toy horse tries to explain what being real is all about.

Close your eyes, and for one moment and listen with the ears of your heart. Perhaps we can place ourselves in the story.

“Real is a thing that happens to you.

When a child loves you for a long time, not just to play with,
but *really* loves you, then you become real.

Rabbit: Does it hurt?

Horse: Sometimes, but when you are real, you don’t mind being hurt.

Rabbit: Does it happen all at once or bit by bit?

Horse: It doesn’t happen all at once. You become.

It takes a long, long time.

That’s why it doesn’t happen to people who break easily
or have sharp edges or have to be carefully kept.

Generally, by the time you are real,
most of your hair has been loved off,
your eyes drop out,

you get loose joints and very shabby!

But, these things don’t matter at all.

Because once you’re real, you can’t be ugly,
except to people who don’t understand.”

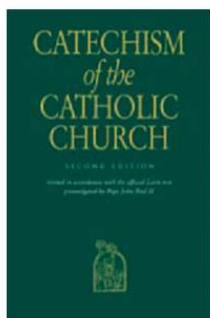
(*Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Collins, Harper and Row, New York, 1922.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question. Break the group into dyads, then surface insights in the wider group.

- Can you name a time in your life in which you loved or have been loved the way the horse describes?

Catechist continues:

May all of us shabby rabbits with loose joints and worn hair, who have been loved into reality, be blessed (during this holy season)!



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 423, 461-464, and 504.

Jesus became human: the Incarnation

Catechist introduces the topic using these key points:

In the Nicene Creed, we profess:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

What does the Church teach us about the Incarnation of Jesus?

- ▶ Jesus was born of a Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Jesus had no biological human father and the conception took place in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both the Gospels of Luke and Matthew attest to this. “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Luke 1:34).
- ▶ In the Bible there are many cases of sterility in which God intervenes in a woman’s old age and she conceives a child: Sarah, mother of Isaac; Hannah, mother of Samuel; Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. This demonstrates God’s power of salvation and redemption in impossible situations.
- ▶ However, Mary was not sterile. She was fertile. She conceives not through human intercourse but through the power of the Spirit. It is a proclamation about the power of God.
- ▶ There are two great signs of contradiction in the gospel that begin and end the Jesus story. They are the virginal conception and the empty tomb.
- ▶ Both demonstrate the inability of human beings to save themselves. Human beings cannot create a savior nor can they raise themselves from the dead.
- ▶ Mary said, “Yes” to God’s plan of salvation for all humanity and bore the Son of

God. She is a model disciple. Her “yes” should be a model for our “yes” to discipleship.

- ▶ The Church’s teaching on the Incarnation is beautifully embodied in the Prefaces of the Christmas season.
- ▶ A Preface is a prayer in the Mass. In that prayer we give God thanks and praise for all his saving works.
- ▶ During the Christmas season, the prayer focuses on the coming of Christ as a human being, on the Incarnation of Christ, and the results of that Incarnation—what was accomplished as a result of Jesus becoming a human being.

Catechist invites participants to divide into groups of four. One group reflects upon the Preface for Christmas I, another group takes the Preface for Christmas II, and so forth. Invite the people to read the preface out loud in their group and then discuss it, using these or similar questions:

- ▶ What is it saying?
- ▶ What does it mean?
- ▶ What does it tell us about the Incarnation, God taking human form in the person of Jesus Christ?
- ▶ What are the implications of the Incarnation?
- ▶ For example, what wonderful thing happened to human beings as a result of Jesus becoming a human being?

Christmas I

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognize in him God made visible we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.

Christmas II

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery, though invisible in his own divine nature, he has appeared visibly in ours; and begotten before all ages, he has begun to exist in time; so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom.

Christmas III

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendor: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.

Epiphany

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature.

Catechist invites each group to share some of their responses with the wider group.

How did you answer the above questions?

- ▶ What was their Preface proclaiming about the Incarnation?
- ▶ What are the implications of God taking human form in the person of Jesus?
- ▶ What wonderful thing happened to human beings as a result of Jesus taking human form?

Catechist continues:

To affirm what you shared and to summarize what the Prefaces teach us:

- ▶ When the first Preface of Christmas proclaims, “For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind,” we understand that:
 - Jesus, the Son of God, who always was (we know that because he is referred to as the Word; see John 1:1) took human form.
 - Because he took human form, it became possible for human beings to encounter the light of God’s glory, to see God through the person (human and divine) of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ In the same Preface, when it acclaims, “as we recognize in him God made visible we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible,” we understand that:
 - Jesus showed us the face of God.
 - Through him we are able to encounter a personal God who loves us. Jesus made an intimate relationship with God possible.
 - Without the Incarnation of Jesus we could not see God. Because God took human form, we are privileged now to encounter him face to face.
- ▶ In the second Preface of Christmas, when it acclaims that Christ came to “restore unity to all creation,” we understand that:
 - Jesus reconciles creation by his taking human form.
 - All creation enjoys unity with God because it now sees how holy it is.
 - Jesus celebrated this holiness by his coming as a man.
 - This is why our Church teaches that all creation is holy. It is holy because God made it holy and God’s Son walked the earth.
 - All creation points to the grandeur of God.
 - All creation as graced, good and blessed by God because of the Incarnation of God’s Son.

- ▶ In the Preface when it insisted, “Jesus’ resurrection brought his mission to completion. A new creation is brought to completion,” we understand that:
 - Sickness, suffering, mourning, and death will not have the last word because we will be with Christ in his kingdom.
 - Ultimately, the work begun at the creation of the world is now complete.
 - We cannot look at the Incarnation without looking at the same time to the fulfillment of the Incarnation, the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.

- ▶ When the second Preface of Christmas affirms that “though invisible in his own divine nature, [Christ] has appeared visibly in ours,” we understand that:
 - We cannot readily see that Jesus is God because he is human like us.
 - He is God, however, and was always God’s Son.
 - There was never a time when Jesus was not God.
 - Just as God always was and always will be, since Jesus is also God, he always was and always will be.
 - However, he chose to come into this world as a human being in history.

- ▶ When the second Preface of Christmas says, “raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom,” we understand that:
 - Because Jesus took human form, he has sanctified and made all creation holy.
 - Thus, we are “lifted up to Jesus.” We share in his holiness.
 - The purpose of the Incarnation is to lead us from this earthly plane of existence into total union with God in eternity.

- ▶ One of the most awesome truths of the Incarnation is in the following statement:
- ▶ “For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendor: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.”
 - We should be dancing in the streets over this one principle alone. It is why Psalm 8 could tell us that we are made a little less than the angels.
 - Through the Incarnation of Jesus, the Eternal Word, there is a divine and human exchange.
 - That means that human beings are elevated to the status of divine.
 - We are given a divine nature and a share in eternal life because of the Christ event.
 - Jesus made human nature holy by becoming human.
 - A holy exchange took place.
 - Jesus took human form, and in turn humans were elevated and brought into union with God’s divinity.
 - St. Irenaeus explained it well. “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man,

that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God” (*Against the Heresies*, III.19.1).

- And with him we can already live from now on in that home that is the bosom of the Father, from which he “descended” and has now “ascended,” bringing us all from the most extreme separation (cf. Eph 4:9-10; Ireneus, *Adversus Haereses* 6, Pref.; Athanasius, *Epistle to Alelphium* 4).
 - In the song, “Amazing Grace” we sing, “how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”
 - Catholic teaching insists that we are made in the image of God and that his divinity exists within us. God would hardly call those he created “wretched!” Sinners, yes, wretched, never!
 - Sacred Scriptures also attest to the concept of *Divine Exchange* that is expressed in the Preface for Christmas. 1 John 3:2 insists that we shall be like Jesus because we shall see the truth of who he is. We will see the fullness of his divinity. A common principle in ancient Hellenistic religions was the principle that “like would know like.” Just knowing God as the divine One makes those who profess belief in him and follow him similarly divine. Since Jesus is equal with God, Christians who call upon his name, share his legacy, and live his life share in his divine life.
- What fabulous news! Few of us look at our own lives and see ourselves as divine. Yet our Church teaches that the divine spark exists in all of us. Christ gifted us with his own divinity.

The Incarnation
Michel Sittow, 1510, public domain



Catechist invites participants to engage in the following reflection that consists of two parts. Do not move to part two until the small groups have had the opportunity to respond to part one.

Part one:

Choose one person you know, a loved one, a friend, or an acquaintance. In thinking about them, how would you describe the divine spark that is within them? What evidence is there that the person you describe has divine life within? What about them exudes the holiness of God?

Reflect and share in small groups, then surface insights in the wider group.

Part Two:

Now that you have had practice in reflecting on the divinity within another person, consider the same question in relation to yourself. How would you describe the divine spark that is within you? What evidence is there that Christ's own divinity resides within you? What about you exudes the holiness of God?

Reflect and share in small groups and surface insights in the wider group. How easy or difficult was this reflection? What did we learn from this reflection about ourselves?

Ultimately the Preface teaches us:

- ▶ “When our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal” (Christmas III Preface)
- ▶ Jesus took on human form with all its weaknesses and in so doing made humanity immortal beings—made it possible for human beings to share in eternal life, made it possible for us to enter heaven!
- ▶ What a tremendous gift we have been given!

Implications for our lives:

- ▶ We are invited to participate in Jesus' Incarnation each and every day.
- ▶ We are invited into his paschal mystery, to grow in holiness, to become real and authentic and cooperate and grow into the gift of divinity we have been given, and to acknowledge and appreciate that same gift in others.
- ▶ Emphasize: We are called to die and rise (the ultimate goal of Jesus' Incarnation), to become vulnerable to one another as Christ was vulnerable for us through his Incarnation.
- ▶ We are challenged to allow Christ to come to birth in our lives each and every day. We are challenged to embrace our divine nature, understand that we are “good” and to share that goodness with the world.



Note to the Catechist

For an optional story of the importance of INCARNATION see Appendix #1.

Implications for discipleship:

- ▶ The Incarnation has implications beyond its unique place in history.
- ▶ The Incarnation of Christ continues in us today as we constantly bring him to rebirth in our lives.
- ▶ Jesus chose to love us unto death—he became one with us and invites us into his life. He invites us to celebrate his presence during his absence.
- ▶ The Incarnation continues every time we submit to the will of Christ in our lives. He is born anew within us.



Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the power of the Incarnation to transform their lives. Catechist witnesses to a story in his or her life or invites another parishioner to witness, then invites participants to witness to one another. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ How does Jesus' Incarnation relate to your life—to an experience in your life?
- ▶ How does it relate to what is going on in our world right now (lack of health care, joblessness, war, and so forth)?

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity and makes arrangements of group participation. What is taking place in the parish community this week/season that would challenge us to participate in bringing Christ to birth in the life of the poor, oppressed, marginalized, the lonely, and disenfranchised? For example, "Our social concerns center provides, food, clothing and household needs to those who are poor in our area. They are looking for volunteers to help at the center. We will meet at the center this Tuesday evening at 6:00."

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person.

- ▶ In what way does this teaching on the Incarnation of Christ challenge you and the Christian community?
- ▶ In what way does today's session challenge you to change?
- ▶ Is there a behavior or attitude in need of transformation?
- ▶ What are you willing to commit to do in response to what you learned about the Incarnation—what are the implications for your life?

Journal

Questions for your journal throughout the week: Continue to reflect on the evidence of Christ's divine life within you as a result of the Incarnation.

If Christ sanctified (made holy) the earth by coming as a human being, how does that reconcile with the present state of the world? What evidence is there in the world that all creation is sanctified as a result of the Incarnation?



Closing Prayer

Read Luke 1:26-35

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA #90-97.

Option 2: Include intercessions and sign of peace.

Option 3: Use the prayer given below.

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift
and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven,
for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Robert Louis Stevenson

APPENDIX

#1. In the book, *The Secret Places of the Burren*, an Irish author of an intriguing travel guide of Ireland tells of an encounter with two men he met during his travels across Ireland. One was a brilliant nuclear physicist and the other a distinguished doctor. Both were in their early thirties, unmarried, and both joined contemplative orders. They shared what motivated their decision to join the contemplative order. Their story gives a glimpse into the meaning of life itself. It can be summed up in the words of a wonderful Benedictine monk, “It’s the Incarnation, silly!”

The men told him: “The human being exists solely for the purpose of becoming an earthly life-form of God. God exists in the human being. Thus, the inner dimension of man should rule his life, and that inner dimension is God. Everything else was a mere side show. One lives a life in practical terms in as close a union as possible with God—not for a reward. One does it because this is the only rational explanation of life itself, the only explanation that gives meaning to death. A life lived in those terms brings unbelievable happiness,” said the monks.

They made an analogy: “A stained glass window looked at from the outside is merely a grayish glaze. But looked at from the inside is a thing of indescribable beauty. If you are on the inside you can experience everything to its fullest. If we accept the ‘inner’ life, it does not really matter whether or not we are in a monastery—fulfillment of life’s purpose will be ours. The Incarnation is alive in us.

Both men are now dead. One gave up world-wide fame, the other great wealth. Neither would concede that they gave up anything. They would contend that they gave up trash for everything. Indeed both were two of the happiest men I ever knew.”

(John M. Feehan, *The Secret Places of the Burren*, published in 1991, Royal Carbery (Cork) P. 106, 107)

#2. When the Christmas Prefaces affirm that a divine/human exchange took place as a result of the Incarnation, I am touched to the core of my being. I have the privilege of experiencing the absolute truth of that statement first hand. It is very Good News for me and Good News that I am called upon to remember over and over again. I have a child with schizophrenia. There are times in the course of this disease when he is very ill. During those times he experiences delusions that tell him he is God. In the midst of this strange insanity he has taught me what this divine exchange is really all about. Because the illness has stripped him of what most young men his age are normally concerned

about, all superfluous desires are stripped away and we who love him are given a glimpse into his soul. In the midst of these periodic bouts of insanity lies a kernel of truth. That truth is that my son has an intimate relationship with God. The divinity that glimmers within my son is often hard to see. Sometimes he looks so unlike the rest of us because he bears all the physical manifestations of mental illness.

The true divinity that is within him sparkles like the sunshine on his best days. Indeed there is a divine spark within. When one listens to the wisdom that flows from him when he is in his “god-mode,” one marvels at this lowly creature of God. This amazing, *poor one of God, anawin*, was expelled from his home parish chapel because of his frightening appearance. They could not recognize the young man they knew so well who grew up as a normal child and active parishioner in their midst. All they saw was this broken homeless-looking person who invaded their prayer space. This person, who at times appears so lowly in the eyes of the world, believes that the most important reason for his and our human existence is complete union with God.

Lest I give you any illusions about his condition, it is a nightmare disease. It has broken the hearts of each member of our family. He has been medicine-compliant now for over a year, and we thank God for this miracle. Within our own family, we have the rare opportunity to experience in some way the Divine Person of Christ who comes to us as this very ill person, lowly much like those first lowly witnesses to the birth of Jesus. Over the course of his illness, when I thought I could take no more, I was reminded of this child in whom the divinity of Christ, the suffering Christ on the cross is so present to us and I try very hard to give thanks for this rare opportunity to love with a love made possible only by the Incarnation of Christ.

Handout: Prefaces for the Christmas Season

Christmas I

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognize in him God made visible we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.

Christmas II

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For on the feast of this awe-filled mystery, though invisible in his own divine nature, he has appeared visibly in ours; and begotten before all ages, he has begun to exist in time; so that, raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom.

Christmas III

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendor: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.

Epiphany

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature.

Handout on Incarnation

If the session on the Incarnation is given during the Christmas season, the following handout may be useful.

Scripture: Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:1-25). This Scripture tells us a great deal about the implications of Jesus becoming a human being. Read the Scripture passage.

Joseph is not the biological father, but he is the legal father of Jesus. The Messiah was destined to come from the House of David. Joseph is the rightful heir of the House of David since his ancestry could be traced back to David. In other words, Jesus possessed the necessary pedigree.

The genealogy is proclaimed at Christmas to emphasize how God writes salvation history with a crooked pen. The story includes an infamous cast of characters—some remarkable, some forgettable. They all had a place in God's story of salvation—as do we.

The people expected a warrior king; they got a lowly carpenter's son. They expected a mighty earthly reign from a throne of might; they got the degradation of the cross—the throne of our salvation. They expected a victorious king and warrior; they got a servant who was victorious in defeat. From the very beginning, God used people who would never pass the test of righteousness to be part of his plan of salvation. It includes scoundrels, prostitutes, crooked kings, and the famous King David. Jesus, like us, comes from a soiled family tree—he understands sin is inherited from one generation to the next.

If God chose saints and sinners, so, too, would Jesus. We are reminded that God continues to work with our shortcomings. The genealogy portrays God's incredible grace poured out on the world—unmerited grace. The genealogy is an invitation to know that we cannot earn salvation. God works in spite of us; God chooses whom God wills and uses whom God chooses to accomplish his work.

In spite of a sordid past, a family tree of shame, oppression, abuse, and the like, one would rise up in the midst of it to free us from it. The genealogy speaks to those of us who must work out our own issues of painful family memories, of oppression and abuse. There is one who has come before us and who frees us from our past—to break the chain of oppression and be an agent of healing. God will use us in the same way if we cooperate with him. No child of God is insignificant or unforgettable. Every person has a role in God's plan to show forth the Incarnation of his Son.

Jesus became human: the Incarnation

In the Nicene Creed, we profess:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

What does the Church teach us about the Incarnation of Jesus?

- ▶ Jesus was born of a Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Jesus had no biological human father and the conception took place in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both the Gospels of Luke and Matthew attest to this. “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (Luke 1:34).
- ▶ In the Bible there are many cases of sterility in which God intervenes in a woman’s old age and she conceives a child: Sarah, mother of Isaac; Hannah, mother of Samuel; Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. This demonstrates God’s power of salvation and redemption in impossible situations.
- ▶ However, Mary was not sterile. She was fertile. She conceives not through human intercourse but through the power of the Spirit. It is a proclamation about the power of God.
- ▶ There are two great signs of contradiction in the gospel that begin and end the Jesus story. They are the virginal conception and the empty tomb.
- ▶ Both demonstrate the inability of human beings to save themselves. Human beings cannot create a savior nor can they raise themselves from the dead.
- ▶ Mary said, “Yes” to God’s plan of salvation for all humanity and bore the Son of God. She is a model disciple. Her “yes” should be a model for our “yes” to discipleship.
- ▶ The Church’s teaching on the Incarnation is beautifully embodied in the Prefaces of the Christmas season.
- ▶ A Preface is a prayer in the Mass. In that prayer we give God thanks and praise for all his saving works.
- ▶ During the Christmas season, the prayer focuses on the coming of Christ as a human being, on the Incarnation of Christ, and the results of that Incarnation—what was accomplished as a result of Jesus becoming a human being.

To affirm what you shared and to summarize what the Prefaces teach us:

- ▶ When the first Preface of Christmas proclaims, “For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind,” we understand that:
 - Jesus, the Son of God, who always was (we know that because he is referred to as the Word; see John 1:1) took human form.
 - Because he took human form, it became possible for human beings to encounter the light of God’s glory, to see God through the person (human and divine) of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ In the same Preface, when it acclaims, “as we recognize in him God made visible we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible,” we understand that:
 - Jesus showed us the face of God.

- Through him we are able to encounter a personal God who loves us. Jesus made an intimate relationship with God possible.
 - Without the Incarnation of Jesus we could not see God. Because God took human form, we are privileged now to encounter him face to face.
- In the second Preface of Christmas, when it acclaims that Christ came to “restore unity to all creation,” we understand that:
- Jesus reconciles creation by his taking human form.
 - All creation enjoys unity with God because it now sees how holy it is.
 - Jesus celebrated this holiness by his coming as a man.
 - This is why our Church teaches that all creation is holy. It is holy because God made it holy and God’s Son walked the earth.
 - All creation points to the grandeur of God.
 - All creation is graced, good and blessed by God because of the Incarnation of God’s Son.
- In the Preface when it insisted, “Jesus’ resurrection brought his mission to completion. A new creation is brought to completion,” we understand that:
- Sickness, suffering, mourning, and death will not have the last word because we will be with Christ in his kingdom.
 - Ultimately, the work begun at the creation of the world is now complete.
 - We cannot look at the Incarnation without looking at the same time to the fulfillment of the Incarnation, the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.
- When the second Preface of Christmas affirms that “though invisible in his own divine nature, [Christ] has appeared visibly in ours,” we understand that:
- We cannot readily see that Jesus is God because he is human like us.
 - He is God, however, and was always God’s Son.
 - There was never a time when Jesus was not God.
 - Just as God always was and always will be, since Jesus is also God, he always was and always will be.
 - However, he chose to come into this world as a human being in history.
- When the second Preface of Christmas says, “raising up in himself all that was cast down, he might restore unity to all creation and call straying humanity back to the heavenly Kingdom,” we understand that:
- Because Jesus took human form, he has sanctified and made all creation holy.
 - Thus, we are “lifted up to Jesus.” We share in his holiness.
 - The purpose of the Incarnation is to lead us from this earthly plane of existence into total union with God in eternity.
- One of the most awesome truths of the Incarnation is in the following statement:
- “For through him the holy exchange that restores our life has shone forth today in splendor: when our frailty is assumed by your Word not only does human mortality receive unending honor but by this wondrous union we, too, are made eternal.”

- We should be dancing in the streets over this one principle alone. It is why Psalm 8 could tell us that we are made a little less than the angels.
 - Through the Incarnation of Jesus, the Eternal Word, there is a divine and human exchange.
 - That means that human beings are elevated to the status of divine.
 - We are given a divine nature and a share in eternal life because of the Christ event.
 - Jesus made human nature holy by becoming human.
 - A holy exchange took place.
 - Jesus took human form, and in turn humans were elevated and brought into union with God's divinity.
 - St. Irenaeus explained it well. "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God" (*Against the Heresies*, III.19.1).
 - And with him we can already live from now on in that home that is the bosom of the Father, from which he "descended" and has now "ascended," bringing us all from the most extreme separation (cf. Eph 4:9-10; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 6, Pref.; Athanasius, *Epistle to Alephium* 4).
 - In the song, "Amazing Grace" we sing, "how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."
 - Catholic teaching insists that we are made in the image of God and that his divinity exists within us. God would hardly call those he created "wretched!" Sinners, yes, wretched, never!
 - Sacred Scriptures also attest to the concept of *Divine Exchange* that is expressed in the Preface for Christmas. 1 John 3:2 insists that we shall be like Jesus because we shall see the truth of who he is. We will see the fullness of his divinity. A common principle in ancient Hellenistic religions was the principle that "like would know like." Just knowing God as the divine One makes those who profess belief in him and follow him similarly divine. Since Jesus is equal with God, Christians who call upon his name, share his legacy, and live his life share in his divine life.
- What fabulous news! Few of us look at our own lives and see ourselves as divine. Yet our Church teaches that the divine spark exists in all of us. Christ gifted us with his own divinity.